THE SHAPE OF LENT AT THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN NEW YORK

2026

At St. Mary's, we try to preserve the communal nature of Lenten practice as a parish family.

This booklet provides a description and schedule of what we will do together during this holy time.

Suggestions for additional Lenten reading may be found at the end of this booklet.

INTRODUCTION

Lent, the forty-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter (Sundays are sometimes excepted), was historically a period of preparation for "catechumens," persons seeking baptism into the life of the church at Easter. Quite soon, however, it became and it continues to be a time of self-examination, penitence and special devotion for all Christians as they prepare for the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Lent is more than just a season of fasting and abstinence; it is a positive opportunity for significant spiritual growth. The Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemann, describes Lent as "the school of repentance which alone will make it possible to receive Easter not as mere permission to eat, to drink, and to relax, but indeed as the end of the 'old' in us, as our entrance into the 'new' life we have in Jesus."

Lent, then, is rooted in an essential aspect of what it is to be a Christian: repentance, *metanoia* in Greek, turning one's life around, putting off the old self and putting on of the new self, which is made real by the Resurrection of Jesus. It is an intensification of that movement which should be the spiritual rhythm of our lives: a continuous turning away from sin and reorientation, through grace, toward God.

Lent is about *conversion*.

While we typically think of Lent as a time of fasting and self-denial, we should also approach it as an opportunity for the renewal of those things which form us as believers and strengthen our faith. When we become Christians, we assume a variety of spiritual disciplines so that we will better follow Jesus — we go to Mass, say our prayers, study the Bible and other spiritual classics, make a regular confession, and devote ourselves to good works and reaching out to serve others. During Lent, we should rededicate ourselves to these disciplines and

make them a bit more stringent as a means to restore vibrancy, life, and passion in our relationship with God. In short, we are hoping to make our hearts and souls bigger, to create more space for God in our lives.

In Lent, we follow Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted, and we attempt through spiritual discipline to resist temptation ourselves. We pray and proceed with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and to his Cross on Good Friday. Throughout Lent we focus also on our own wilderness of temptation while keeping an eye toward the Resurrection.

Again from Fr. Schmemann, Lent is a time of "bright sadness." *Sadness*, because we focus on the passion and death of Jesus and on the sins of us all which brought him to the Cross. And *bright*, for the promise of Lent is the glory and joy of the Lord's Resurrection at Easter.

One aspect of Lent which is rarely mentioned nowadays is the communal. In earlier times, Lent was a discipline taken on

by an entire community or even a society. It was something which everyone did together, and the rhythm of life in society was adjusted to support this common discipline. Everyone supported everyone else in the Lenten discipline, and society was so ordered as to make this mutual support possible. One might think of this as a kind of spiritual teamwork, and like anything done as a team it bound people together and helped create community.

In the twenty-first century world in which we live, this has been completely lost. Christianity, since the Reformation, has become a plurality of "christianities," not bound by common belief or practice. Society has become almost entirely secular, and the rhythm of contemporary life is most often counter to spiritual practice. The communal aspect of Lent has been lost. Or almost lost.

That is what we aim to preserve at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin.

A COLLECT FOR LENT

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

THE SHAPE OF LENT

Weekly Fasts & Abstinence

Fasting and abstinence are linked with repentance in Sacred Scripture. When we fast, we are reminded spiritually and even physically of our weakness, our finitude, and our need for God. Each week, we will abstain from a particular pleasure or shortcoming. We may break that on Sundays, which are sometimes thought of as "feast" days in celebration of the Resurrection. Similarly, Fridays during Lent are days when Christians have traditionally abstained from meat, as these days are "little Good Fridays," which point toward the Friday of Holy Week.

You may choose to do each of the following suggested communal practices of abstinence for one week only; or you may let them build on each other, so that by the end of Lent you are doing all six weekly practices at the same time.

Daily Readings

During Lent we will be reading common Scriptures together. Read the Psalm for the week, and then read and meditate upon the scripture passage given for the day. You may wish to incorporate this in one of the forms for Morning or Evening Prayer found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. This year, our readings will take us through salvation history, beginning with creation and moving toward the climax of God's redemption and the beginning of the new creation through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Easter Vigil

Our Lenten journey together will culminate in the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection at the Great Vigil of Easter at 7:00 in the evening on Holy Saturday, April 4.

OUR JOURNEY

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18 - 21

Fast on Ash Wednesday

The Psalms

WEEK 1

February 22 - 28

Abstinence: Sweets & Treats

The Creation & the Fall

WEEK 2

March 1 - 7

Abstinence: Unnecessary Spending

The Patriarchs & the Exodus

WEEK 3

March 8 - 14

Abstinence: Careless Talk & Profanity

The Kings

WEEK 4

March 15 - 21

Abstinence: Entertainment & Technology

The Prophets & the Exile

WEEK 5

March 22 - 28

Abstinence: Alcohol or Coffee

The Life & Teachings of Jesus

HOLY WEEK

March 29 - April 4

Abstinence: Food or Meals

The Passion of Jesus

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18-21

Thursday	Psalm 103
Friday	Psalm 38
Saturday	Psalm 78

The Ashes

Lent begins with the imposition of ashes as a sign of our mortality and penitence for our sins. As we receive the ashes, we hear the words *Remember, O man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return* (Genesis 3.19). The ashes are imposed in the form of a cross, pointing to our great hope in the grace of God through the Cross of Christ which grants us a sharing in the power of his Resurrection.

The Ash Wednesday Fast

Traditionally, the church has fasted from all food on Ash Wednesday to remind us that our physical hunger for food points to our greater spiritual hunger for God. If you are unable to fast for the entire day, then consider fasting from dinner.

WEEK ONE

February 22-28

Psalm of the Week	104
Sunday	Genesis 1.1-2.3
Monday	Genesis 2.4-25
Tuesday	Genesis 3
Wednesday	Genesis 4
Thursday	Genesis 6.1-8; 7
Friday	Genesis 9.8-17
Saturday	Genesis 11.1-9

Abstinence: Sweets & Treats

This week, resolve to deny yourself any type of sweets or dessert. This could mean a latte in the morning or chocolate in the evening. As you do so, notice what happens inside when you are denied something you've become accustomed to or something you really want — even something as inconsequential as dessert or candy.

Reading: Creation & Fall

In the opening chapters of the Bible, we quickly move from a world where humanity and God walk harmoniously in close relationship, to a fallen world of rebellion, sin, pain, shame, and competition with God. As we make our way through this first week, note how God interacts with his creation and how we are invited to respond.

WEEK TWO

March 1-7

Psalm of the Week	136
Sunday	Genesis 12.1-3; 15; 22.1-19
Monday	Genesis 37.12-28; 41.37-57; 50.15-21
Tuesday	Exodus 1.8-2.10; 3
Wednesday	Exodus 7.1-13; 12; 14.10-31
Thursday	Exodus 19.4-6; 20.1-21; 33.1-6
Friday	Numbers 13.17-14.11, 26-35
Saturday	Deuteronomy 30.11-20

Abstinence: Unnecessary Spending

This week, resolve to spend nothing on yourself except what is absolutely necessary. Buy no new clothes or gadgets, books or music. Resist the impulse buying that is so easy and instant on the Internet. Eat cheaply and save money. Practice living simply and consider giving away the money you save.

Reading: The Patriarchs & the Exodus

As we saw in the story of the Tower of Babel, the world through pride has become divided. But God did not forsake his creation. He began a rescue mission, a way to put the world back the way it ought to be. This began with the call of Abraham and the people of Israel. It continues today with God's call of the church. Focus this week on God's faithfulness to his people.

WEEK THREE

March 8-14

Psalm of the Week	72
Sunday	Joshua 1.1-9; 6; 24
Monday	1 Samuel 8; 10.17-27; 15
Tuesday	1 Samuel 16.1-13; 17
Wednesday	2 Samuel 7
Thursday	1 Kings 3.1-15; 8.22-26, 46-61
Friday	2 Kings 22.1-2; 23.1-26
Saturday	2 Kings 17.6-23; 24.10-17

Fast: Careless Talk & Profanity

"If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain." (James 1.26) This week abstain from carelessness in your speech. How easy it is to repeat gossip, to delight in malicious talk, to speak out in anger and wound others with words, to take God's name in vain. Notice how habitual this talk becomes and resolve to curb it.

Reading: The Kings

As we continue the narrative of salvation history, we see more clearly the people God has called to participate in his rescue mission are themselves broken. Israel calls a king, and we read the spectacular promises God makes to David. But as we see the failures of the kings, we ask "Whatever became of those promises?" It appears we need a wholly different king of king.

WEEK FOUR

March 15-21

Psalm of the Week	44
Sunday	Hosea 2
Monday	Amos 5.1-6.8
Tuesday	Isaiah 1.12-31; 35
Wednesday	Jeremiah 29.1-14; 31.31-37
Thursday	Ezekiel 36.22-36
Friday	Nehemiah 2.1-8; 8.1-12; 9
Saturday	Zephaniah 3.9-20

Abstinence: Entertainment & Tech

This week, forego usual entertainments. Turn off the TV, drive without the radio, put the podcasts aside. Log off Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and blogs. Try to check and respond only to necessary work emails. What does it feel like to increase the silence? Ask what silence does for you, and spend the time listening for God's voice.

Reading: The Prophets & Exile

As a result of their idolatry and social injustice, Israel has been sent into exile. They are in a foreign land not as tourists, but as an oppressed people. Listen to the prophets as they declare the sins of God's people. Are we guilty of some of those same sins? Listen also to the hope given by a gracious God who forgives sin and remembers his promise to rescue the world.

WEEK FIVE

March 22-28

Psalm of the Week	2
Sunday	Luke 2.1-21
Monday	Mark 1.1-15
Tuesday	Mark 4.1-20
Wednesday	Mark 5.1-20
Thursday	Mark 8.27-9.13
Friday	Mark 9.43-50
Saturday	Mark 10.17-45

Fast: Alcohol or Coffee

Choose either coffee or alcohol (or both) and refrain from drinking it this week. If neither is something you regularly enjoy, choose another "staple" in your diet. Pay attention to what happens when you thirst for something you routinely enjoy. Try to pray when you have the desire for the thing from which you are abstaining.

Reading: The Life & Teachings of Jesus

Tangible tension builds throughout our readings. Israel is a broken nation. They have gone through slavery, exodus, monarchy, exile, and, finally, return to the land of Israel, although under Roman rule. Israel's ups and downs mirror the ups and downs of the entire human race. But God's rescue plan now takes a huge step forward as the Messiah is born.

HOLY WEEK

March 29 - April 4

Psalm of the Week	22
Sunday	John 12.1-8, 12-26
Monday	John 12.27-50
Tuesday	John 13.1-30; 16.16-24
Wednesday	John 14
Maundy Thursday	John 17
Good Friday	John 18.1-19.30
Holy Saturday	John 19.31-42
Easter Day	John 20.1-18

Fast: Food or Meals

Pick a type of food (like meat or carbs or even all "solids") and fast from it for the week, or pick a meal to skip entirely on a daily basis. If you skip meals, spend the time you would have spent preparing and eating food to pray, read the Bible or some spiritual classic, or serve others.

Reading: The Passion of Jesus

Our journey through salvation history slows to a crawl as we walk through the last week of Jesus' life. In Holy Week, we experience the most solemn moments of the liturgical year, but our solemnity is transformed into jubilee as we enter into the fifty-day season of Easter. Take time to refocus and examine your life this week. Be fully present in this final week as salvation history reaches its culmination and fulfillment.

LENTEN OBSERVANCES AT ST. MARY'S

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18

Said Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 8:00 a.m.

High Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 12:10 p.m.

Solemn Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 6:00 p.m.

Ashes will be imposed for visitors throughout the day in the Mercy Chapel, but attendance at a Mass is strongly recommended for all Saint Marians

STATIONS of the CROSS

Fridays at 6:00 p.m. following

Evening Prayer at 5:30 p.m.

ADULT FORMATION

Sundays at 9:45 a.m.

"Service Stories"

Come listen to people share how God has called them to serve the least, the lost, and the left behind — prisoners, immigrants, even the Creation itself — and ask how God may be leading you to serve

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Wednesdays at 6:45 p.m.

"Why on This Night? The Old Testament and the Easter Vigil"

Join us for Evening Prayer at 5:30 p.m. and mass at 6:00 p.m. followed by soup and bread at 6:45 p.m. with conversation around the evening's topic led by Fr. Stephen Morris. All are welcome.
Please RSVP to swood@stmvnyc.org.

LENTEN QUIET DAY

Saturday March 7

Led by Br. Thomas Steffensen, SSF

To sign up, contact swood@stmvnyc.org.

PALM SUNDAY

March 29

Solemn Mass with Procession at 11:00 a.m.

THE SACRED TRIDUUM

Maundy Thursday Liturgy

April 2 at 6:00 p.m.

Watch Before the Blessed Sacrament

9:00 p.m. to Midnight on Maundy Thursday

Good Friday Liturgy

April 3 at 12:30 p.m.

The Holy Saturday Liturgy

April 4 at 9:00 a.m.

The Great Vigil of Easter

April 4 at 7:00 p.m.

EASTER DAY

Sunday April 5

Said Mass with Hymns — 9:00 a.m.

Solemn Mass with Procession — 11:00 a.m.

RECOMMENDED READING FOR LENT

Pope Benedict XVI, *Journey to Easter: Spiritual Reflection for the Lenten Season*.

Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter.

Bede Frost. *Lent with St. Benedict*.

Stanley Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words*.

Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*.

Fleming Rutledge, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross*.

Alexander Schmemann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*.

Samuel Wells, *Power & Passion: Six Characters in Search of Resurrection*.

William H. Willimon, *Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross*.

N.T. Wright, *Christians at the Cross: Finding Hope in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus*.

N.T. Wright, *The Scriptures, the Cross & the Power of God: Reflections for Holy Week*.

PLEDGE

I, _____,
pledge to join with fellow parishioners in taking upon myself the Corporate Lenten Discipline described in *The Shape of Lent at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin 2026*. This involves fasting and abstinence, daily worship, meditation, and the study of Holy Scripture. I pray that the Grace of God will enable me and those others who have taken on this discipline to grow spiritually and to be bound closer to one another in the fellowship of Christ's Body at St. Mary's.

To Access this Booklet Online:

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